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CRISTIAN RÉKA MÓNKA

Rewriting the Third Position

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of the spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality [...] – and lastly to the assumption of the armour of and alienating identity...

(Lacan, J.)

The aim of the essay is to provide a viewpoint about the post-colonial text, about the *post-colonial body* as the subject rewriting a previous writing, (just as a body re-producing an other one), all in the light of hybridity, history and language, as constituents of the post-colonial subjectivity. The trajectory is that of the identification and otherness. Different post-colonialist texts, joined by the already known intertext of colonialism, are assigned a «third space» in which dialogue can be and is being conducted. This is the space of cross-culturalism, described in the writing back scenario as «a potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest» (Ashcroft, 1989, 53).

Post-colonialism, as it is now used in various literary and critical fields, describes a remarkably heterogeneous set of subject positions and critical enterprises. It is a term coined as a way of (re)ordering the condition of the nativist, the indigenous, the culturally other, the ex-colonized political body that is in the process of (re)creating its identity through the discourses of marginality. Post-colonialism is a cultural marker, and as such is an oppositional form of the traditional center, a counterpart of the logocentric «reading practices», and hence a trademark name for the category of a literary activity (writing and re-writing, reading and re-reading, interpreting and re-interpreting) that emerged as desire (and implicitly need) for an other critical practice that submerges, via its own affirmation in literature and politics, into political legitimacy by its subversive political energies disseminated towards a/the center that used to define, label, mark its subjects via the imperial institutional power. This literary activity is embodied into textual constructs that are an inclusive inventory of feature-texts (oral or written) that constitute the voices from the margins, a concatenated polyphony that aspire to existence and validation.

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye.

(Homi K. Bhabha)

Post-colonial texts provide, in this essay, the frame for the productive capacity of the rewriting a story as *rewriting a nation*. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak states that there is «the absence of a text that can answer one back» (Spivak, 1988, 243). In this context she seeks to develop a strategy of reading that will speak to the historically muted subject, which is inscribed as a site left open for the discourses after de-colonization. This site is a place where the signs of cultural difference are articulated on the premises that understand the recognition of the (pre)dominant discourse(s) that mark this locus in the rank of hierarchy, norms and marginalization. This place of the marked native, often coined as the «third space» (in certain contexts with initial letters capitalized), of the ex- or post-colonized body (politic or not), is a space of constant interpenetration

and re-articulation, that permits the story (any story) born within that culture, to be told and re-told, written and re-written, accordingly to that specific, interpretive community. This space, that of the *multiculturalism*, of the cultural exchange, is a place where signification takes place, where the "present comes to be repeated, relocated, and translated." (Bhabha, 1990, 256), a curious realm of hybridity where in Hannah Arendt's words the "private interests assume public significance" and where Edward Said prescribes a kind of "analytic pluralism" as a form of critical attention appropriate to the cultural effects of a particular nation.

For the nation as a form of cultural elaboration, in the Gramscian sense, is an agency of ambivalent narration that holds culture at its most productive position, as a force for subordination, fracturing, diffusing, reproducing, as much as producing, creating, forcing, guiding. (H. K. Bhabha)

"...the ambivalent figure of a nation is a problem of its transitional history, its conceptual indeterminacy, its wavering between vocabularies" ... "the heimlich pleasures of the hearth, the unheimlich terrors of the space or race of the Other... the langue of the law and the parole of the people." (H. K. Bhabha)

"...to encounter a nation as it is written displays a temporality of culture and social consciousness more in tune with the partial, overdetermined process by which textual meaning is produced through the articulation of difference in language; more in keeping with the problem of closure which plays enigmatically in the discourse of the sign". (H. K. Bhabha)

„The marginal or «minority» is not the space of a celebratory, or utopian self-marginalization. It is much substantial intervention into the justifications of modernity progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism; the «deep» nation, the long past rationalize the authoritarian, «normalizing» tendencies within cultures, all in the name of the national interest or the ethnic prerogative. In this sense, then, the ambivalent antagonistic perspective of "nation as narration", in Homi K. Bhabha's terms, will establish the cultural boundaries of the nation so that they might be acknowledged as "containing thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated is the process of cultural production." (Bhabha, 1990, 5) The address to nation as narration stresses the insistence of political power and cultural authority in what Derrida describes as the "irreducible excess of the syntactic over the semantic" (Derrida, 1981, 221)

The margins of the nations displace the centre, the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis (H. K. Bhabha)

The reason why a post-colonial text, as a cultural, encompassing text, cannot be sufficient in itself is that "the act of cultural enunciation – the place of utterance – is crossed by the difference of writing or *écriture*" (Ashcroft, B., 1995, 208.):

The linguistic difference that informs any cultural performance is dramatized in the common semiotic account of the disjuncture between the subject of a proposition and the subject of enunciation, which is not represented in the statement but which is the acknowledgment of its discursive embeddedness and address, its cultural positionality, its reference to a present time and a specific space. [...] The production of the meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot «in itself» be conscious. What this unconscious relation introduces is an ambivalence in the act of interpretation... (Bhabha, H. in Ashcroft, 1995, 208.)

I have subjectively chosen to regard sample fragments of literary texts that are writing again(st), rewrite, and overwrite textual constructs that are considered center, canon, etc. In the integration of these texts as illustration and corroboration, I have tried to make visible throughout this essay, the plurality of possible

constructions in cultural studies and the strategic nature of these constructions. These oral or written texts and body of texts are of great importance in our understanding of culture, any culture, of its various forms, of the relation both of culture and its interpretation, of the (other) practices that shape it. The *Holder of the World* by Bharati Mukherjee, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Love Medicine* by Louise Erdrich, *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* by Amos Tutuola, *Arrow of God* by Chinua Achebe, *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, etc. as literary, post-colonial, Third Space texts, in this sense, become metonymies of «high» literature (as axis of a center), become the critique of the canonic, literary center.

The *Third Space*, the agonistic space of hybridity though unrepresentable in itself, ensures the fact that the



discursive conditions have no primordial fixity, the same elements can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and finally read/written anew. Reading (and implicitly education via reading) becomes a part of the technology of colonialist subjectification by establishing a norm through critical claims to universality, this implies one's needs for the alternatives of writing/rewriting itself as nation. Texts become "post-colonialized" after their rewritings in alternative discourses, and after reading they become meta-post-colonial ones. These «enter» the body of the reader, who internalizing the text reproduces it in its own context of the given culture (and age). The text has been rewritten once again. Literary and historical versions cannot and ought not be reduced to a single univocal version, they must remain irreducibly plural and epistemic.

...The function of the mirror-stage as a particular case of the function of the imago, which is to establish a relation between the organism and its reality" (Jacques Lacan)

In the following I will give examples of texts that (ful)fill the space of the post-colonial site, in the sense of writing and re-writing these texts. In order to rewrite one needs primal stories that can be altered, transformed, to have the base of what is later to become a metatext of the primal one.

It will be seen, likewise, that this Custom House sketch has a certain propriety, of a kind always recognized in literature, as explaining how a large portion of the following pages came into my possession, and as offering proofs of the authenticity of a narrative therein contained. This, in fact, [...] is my true reason for assuming a personal relation with the public. In accomplishing the main purpose, it has appeared allowable, by a few extra touches, to give a faint representation of a mode of life not heretofore described, together with some of the characters that move in it, among the author happened to make one. (N. Hawthorne *The Custom House*, in Lauter, 1994, pp. 2178-2179.)

The significance of history for the writing of *The Scarlet Letter* as a post-colonial text or later on of *The Holder of the World* lies at the base of historical studies, which seems to be a narcissistic discipline. The myths of the story of history as representation of the continuity of events, authorize nothing less than the construction of world reality and its authenticity touch.

History's a big savings bank, says Venn, we can all make infinite reality withdrawals. But we'll be able to compare our disparate experience in the same reality, and won't that be fun? [...] the team is working on the thousand most relevant facts, the thousand things that make me, you, you – to construct a kind of personality genome. Each of us has her own fingerprint, her DNA, but she has a thousand other identifiers as well. [...] you can create a different personality and therefore elicit a different experience. [...] But the African reality may be more elemental, dream-like, mythic. (Mukherjee, 1994, 6-7.)

The problem of history and implicitly that of the authenticity becomes crucial in N. Hawthorne's and B. Mukherjee's texts. In the above works there is not only the question of which is truth and which is fiction, time and space, determinacy and indeterminacy (with these concepts we seem to transcend into the grounds of the postmodern literature, as it is in Hassanian terms), the historical/political narrativity is the one that structures forms of reality by structuring narratives. History here is reflecting the pattern of events and records (documents, computer data and programming, songs, tales, old stories inherited from ancestors, native language, etc.), its task being not merely to contest the message of the history, but to engage a medium of narrativity, to inscribe new messages on the old pergamens, to become a palimpsest. These works of literary art become markers of the rhetoricity of times from a found document to Hawthorne and to Mukherjee or Rushdie. Since writing itself is also a way of markedness, these texts prove to mark by their very presence the locus of the Other, the place of the (cultural) otherness.

They had assembled a past with its own integrity. From raw, programmed data, they had created images; the images had their own brief identity. (The individual programs began fading as the data were used up. It's an eerie feeling, watching faces and buildings slowly dissolve, lose their color and texture, lose their edges and

dimension, and revert to gray). It's a primitive technology with infinite applications. It solves man's oldest or second-oldest preoccupation, to master time, which seems even harder than mastering space. (Mukherjee, 1994, 278-279)

As one of the most important features in these texts, as in *Love Medicine* or *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* by Amos Tutuola, the hybridity figured as the Kristevan intertextuality, besides language use, is understood not only as a dimension shared by all texts but also as a deliberate, self-conscious reply of one text to another, as a chain of desiring texts (similar to the Deleuzian chain of desiring bodies). The regional patterns of language and culture have formed the core of the final text, and for the development of the literary form being fruitful metaphors in the idea of cross-fertilization between cultures. The interweaving of literary, cultural, editorial, etc. and practices produce in the above texts new forms even as older forms continue to exist and co-exist, American Indian mixtures of cultural, traditional features, Nigerian English/english, Creole, etc. The «old» text is marked in the new text even by translations that carry the message of the ancestors:

Then he was Small Mouth. Close Lightning. He was Stick Across. Beaver. He was Facing Sky. Ending Hawk, or perhaps he was Dressed in Clay. All Hill. Steps Over Track. Hard Sky. Reflection of the Sun. He was With Horns. Call him Long Moose Limp or Swampy Woman Man. His name was Small. It was Hind Quarters. It was Face Appearing. It was none of these. I hold his name close as my own blood and I will never let it out. I only spoke it that once so he would know he was alive. (Erdich, 1993, 82.)

This has significant implications on one's writing and/or rewriting a text, or a nation. Defined as "dominated literatures" and recognized by the elements of difference, common to such literatures, identity and opposition, post-colonial literatures are seen to tend inevitably towards a "writing back to the centre" by subversive strategies. No one of these texts is self-contained, neither is an obedient follower of its predecessors. The repetition and difference has become an important base for challenging hierarchical notions of the unity, authorship, authority and sanctity of the literary text as a post-colonial site. Orality is being transformed into literature, utterance into a form of technologized writing that is directed to the centre.

(Lulu Nanapush) I never grew from the curve of my mother's arms. I still wanted to anchor myself against her... She had vanished, a great surrounding shore, leaving me to spill alone. I wanted to fill her tracks, but luck ran out the holes. My wishes were worn soles. I stumbled in those shoes of desire... I lived by bells orders, flat voices, rough English. I missed the old language in my mother's mouth (Erdich, 1993, 68.)

The dynamics of the post-colonial writing generates an entire historical and cultural matrix of oppositions. Similar in its very existence with the *écriture féminine*, the post-colonial text introduces the power of being present by means of difference. In case of the literatures written in English, English itself becomes the post-colonial language (as "english") of that emergent literature and culture that affords the crucial middle ground separable from indigeneity and imitation, as an ambivalent and persistent dialogue with colonialism, with the colonizer. As the Bakhtinian dialogism is the "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices", post-colonial literatures are a spectrum of voices from the margins, a polyphony which disrupt the authority of a single voice, allowing its characters to speak "in their own voices". In the post-colonial text the "english" is the carnivalesque phenomenon in the sense of disrupting the authority of the English as an authoritative language, the third language of the «in between», an interlanguage. This element in itself is subversive by introducing the linguistic and thus cultural alternative. The "english" as a hybrid language functions as a kind of Derridean writing, that of the «archi-écriture». The text of the post-colonial literary text is the speech of the native/indigenous encapsulated in the writing/language of the center. Here the author is not «dead» in Barthesian sense, nor absent, the birth of the conscious post-colonial reader here, via these texts is at the expense of the presence

of the author. The author (as the politics of the post-colonial text) has primacy, most of the post-colonial texts may thus enter the realm of the confessional literature.

This spelling of "english" reflects the fact that there is a need to distinguish between what is proposed as a standard code, English (as the language of the imperial center) and the linguistic code, english, which "has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world." (Aschcroft et al., 1989, 8). One of the most subtle powers of language in the post-colonial texts is the function of naming, a technique for knowing a colonized place or/and people. To name the world is to understand it. Henceforth the translations. In Chinua Achebe's words "the languages bears the weight and the texture of a different experience" by adapting the alien language/context to the exigencies of a mother grammar, syntax, vocabulary, modalities of speaking the voice out from the "subaltern, when this speaks" (Spivak). Language interminglings produce a culturally distinctive writing.

Textualization/Writing legitimizes. To write a post-colonial text is one of the most primordial activity of differentiation, it is the intertextualization of the context since it inaugurates consciousness and institutes beings, which emerge out of unconscious, repressed, or even as non-being. Post-colonial texts have drawn their source texts as well as its cultural dynamism from diasporic archives. The discourses of the cross-culturalism, post-colonialism and implicitly, colonialism constitute that politics of reading which organizes and manages a critique within a framework of post-colonial subjectivity, functioning under the aegis of re-thinking/re-writing identity and difference and mostly, self-representation. These works need a particular kind of reader, responding to series of paradigmatic and epistemic transformations of the (ex)colonial subject.

Spivakian practical politics of the open end.

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